

## AN INVESTIGATION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF BLOG AS LEARNING TOOL FOR WRITING

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**Abstract:** This research aimed to investigate fourth semester students' experiences in using blog as learning tool for writing. The method of this research was case study. The subjects of this research were five students of fourth semester of English Language Education Study Program of FKIP Untan Pontianak in Academic Year 2013/2014. The data of this research were obtained from the observation and interview. The findings indicated that every student affirmed that blog carried several benefits in supporting their learning especially in writing because blog has a program that can correct their mistakes automatically in writing and the students can practice their writing skill. As the result, blog improved students' writing skill in term of vocabulary, grammar, ideas, and the process of writing itself. Besides that, through writing in blog students can learn to be more cooperative and they can build communication with people around the world. Moreover, knowledge and ideas that students shared on their blogs were still accessible.

**Key words:** Blog, Students' Experiences, Writing

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menginvestigasi pengalaman mahasiswa semester empat dalam menggunakan blog sebagai media untuk menulis. Dalam penelitian ini penulis menggunakan metode studi kasus. Subjek dari penelitian ini adalah mahasiswa semester empat program studi Bahasa Inggris di FKIP Untan Pontianak tahun ajaran 2013/2014. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi dan interview. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa setiap mahasiswa menyatakan bahwa blog memberikan beberapa manfaat dalam mendukung belajar mereka khususnya dalam menulis karena blog memiliki program yang bisa mengoreksi secara otomatis kesalahan mereka dalam menulis dan mereka bisa mempraktikkan kemampuan menulis mereka. Hasilnya, blog dapat memperbaiki kemampuan menulis mahasiswa khususnya dalam kosa kata, tata bahasa, ide, dan proses dalam menulis tersebut. Selain itu, melalui menulis dalam blog mahasiswa bisa belajar lebih cooperative serta mereka bisa membangun komunikasi dengan orang-orang di seluruh dunia. Lagipula, pengetahuan dan ide-ide yang mereka bagikan dalam blog mereka masih bisa diakses oleh pembaca.

**Kata kunci:** Blog, Pengalaman mahasiswa, Menulis

The rapid changing of life requires a support for continuous learning and ongoing creation of new ideas and skills. The life-long education is becoming a necessity in tomorrow's world. Thanks to Internet, the education process changed significantly in last two decades (Virtic, 2012). One of the latest developments that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are starting to implement in their teaching-learning processes is the use of blogs as a means for transferring the usual classroom activities to the cyberspace, while conferring students and instructors with a superior connectivity for the development of one-on-one and many-to-one relationships.

Commonly, foreign language teachers or lecturers have responsibility towards their learners to create and maintain environments that motivate learners to continue learning even after class ends. Multimedia resources provide the students with authentic and interesting tools to help achieve learners independence. Computer-based learning environments can be manipulated to provide students with an opportunity to learn, practice, and communicate outside the classroom. Therefore, the rapid advance of technology and media ease the students to gain information and knowledge from various media, especially from internet. It will be useful in teaching learning process, for example by using blog.

In order to use technology as a media in teaching and learning process, blog has been used by the lecturers of English Language Education Study Program of Languages and Arts Education Department of Teacher Training and Education Faculty of Tanjungpura University Pontianak in Teaching Learning with ICT (Information and Communication Technology) class. However, now the students' blogs can be accessed through [www.ontellblog.wordpress.com](http://www.ontellblog.wordpress.com) (English Language Education Study Program's blog). In line with the class requirements, the fourth semester students of English Language Education Study Program of Languages and Arts Education Department of Teacher Training and Education Faculty of Tanjungpura University in Academic Year 2013/2014 created and maintained blogs.

Since blogs have only recently been gaining popularity as an educational tool, little research about the use of blog in the foreign language classroom has been done. The first example is a research conducted by Sun and Chang (2012). They examined how blog and their interactive and collaborative features help academically-advanced graduate students process academic writing knowledge and make sense of their writer identity. They took the data from seven graduate students undertaking Master's level study in TESOL and Linguistics. They are required to find five journal articles in TESOL-related disciplines, and analyzed the moves (Introduction, Method, Result, and Conclusion) and language samples used in each move. The results suggested that the blog's activity was not only encouraged students to actively and reflectively engage in knowledge sharing, knowledge generation, and the development of numerous strategies to cope with difficulties encountered in the learning process; but blogs also endowed students with a sense of authorship as the writers of blog entries (Sun and Chang, 2012: 43). Whereas, instead of looking at the blog's activity, in this research the writer described in detail about the students' experiences during keeping blogs that required them to find and share the newest websites that related to their blogs' topic.

The second example is a research conducted by Mynard (2007). She has collected data from female Japanese college students. Twentytwo students kept voluntary blogs in their free time throughout a semester they spent studying English in the UK. The students used blog to write about everyday activities, and they also used their blogs to write the reflection about their language learning. In particular, the students discussed feelings about their exam results and occasions when they were disappointed in their spoken English. The finding, she suggested that blog could be used as a tool in teaching learning process. In line with Mynard (2007), the writer gathered data from the English Language Education Study Program Students who continuously updated their blogs.

Therefore, in this research the writer focused on investigating the active students' experiences in using blog as learning tool for writing, regarding on how important blog as learning tool for writing particularly in English. In addition, knowing the importance of blog in promoting and supporting students' English language learning especially in writing English may lead teachers or lecturers to pay more attention to the use of online writing tools in teaching and learning process. Moreover, the process of students' learning may give them a reflection on how technology may support students' English language learning.

## **METHOD**

The method of this research is case study. According to Borden& Abbott (2008: 236) "The case study is a descriptive technique in which you observe and report on a single case (or a few cases)." In addition, Lier cited in Hinkel (2005: 195) stated that case study research is primarily a form of qualitative and interpretive research, although quantitative analysis is sometimes used if they are deemed relevant. Yin and Merriam in Hatch (2002) argued that case study is a special kind of qualitative work that investigates a contextualized contemporary (as opposed to historical) phenomenon within specified boundaries. Merriam in Hatch (2002) offered examples of such bounded phenomenon in education: "a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group." Furthermore, cases might be selected because they are unique, representative, typical, or about special interest. Case somehow represents the interesting/special topic of the study empirically. Empirical means as a whole. Case study method was used because the researcher considered that it was necessary to develop a thick description of the phenomena. The researcher's intention is not to generalize the result with other group/ class which also use blog as learning tool for supporting their learning particularly in writing.

The subjects of this research were the fourth semester students of English Language Education Study Program of Languages and Arts Education Department of Teacher Training and Education Faculty of Tanjungpura University Pontianakin Academic Year 2013/2014 who were keeping blogs during they spent studying English in Teaching Learning with ICT class. 62 students' blogs were observed and five students were interviewed. The interviewees were selected based on the highest number of posting on the students' blogs. Semi-structured interview was carried out as a follow-up instrument to gain further explanation of observation which had been conducted to know about the students' activity on their blogs. The interview was

conducted one by one student in English but sometimes Indonesian used if the students had difficulties in expressing their ideas in English.

Triangulation method was used to collect the data. Triangulation method uses evidence from different sources to corroborate the same fact or finding. The data were collected from observation, interview, and library research to provide complete picture with detailed information regarding the topic. The observation was conducted on the students' blogs. Then, the writer counted every single posting on their blogs in order to find the active students. By knowing the number and the length of their blogs' posting, the writer chose 5 students' blogs which have the highest number of posting and the author became the participant of this research.

In addition, considering that every student had different experiences during keeping their blogs, it was necessary for the writer to conduct an individual analysis towards students' responses. Then, the writer analyzed the interview results by using thematic analysis. According to Braun & Clarke (2006: 16) thematic analysis are as follows:

1. Transcribing; making the transcript sheet of the interview.
2. Coding; classify the statements which are said by the students into some dimensions which are related to the topic of this research.
3. Emerging themes; create themes which related to the topic of this research.
4. Reducing/deciding themes; conclude the result based on the interpretation from the stage before in the form of sentences.
5. Producing the report; involving the final analysis and write up of the research report.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

#### **1. Overview the Students' Blogs**

This research aimed to investigate about how important blog as learning tool for writing for fourth semester students of English Language Education Study Program of Languages and Arts Education Department of Teacher Training and Education Faculty of Tanjungpura University Pontianak in Academic Year 2013/2014. Before the writer answers the research question, the writer will give a description about the students' activity on their blogs.

Based on the observation's result on the students' blogs, the writer found the active students who will be interviewed. The table below shows the result of the observation in this research.

**Table**  
**Students' Frequency of Blogging**

<b>Number of Postings</b>	<b>Length of Postings</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>
50	68-384 words	1
30	34-654 words	7

26	35-358 words	5
20	25-455 words	3
15	100-963 words	43
10	77-303 words	1
6	2-1255 ds	2

## 2. The Benefits of Blog

### a. Helping Students to Correct their Mistakes

All participants affirmed that blog was easier for them to correct their mistakes, for example when they wrote in the wrong spelling, the blog was automatically corrected it. That was what makes them eager to write on their blogs because the blog has an automatic program spelling check.

When I write in Blog for example, it's more easier for me because yeah there's automatically spelling check, right? So, I'm kind of person who has a problem with spelling actually. So, I like for example me missing the words so when I write and for example I'm not really know if I'm right or not in my spelling, right? But when I'm try to write on Blog for example there will be automatically spelling check (S1-Interview).

Another mistake that the students made when they were writing on their blog was they wrote in wrong sentence. Because of they wrote on their blogs by using computer so that they did not need to pay for the correction pen to correct the mistakes. They only need to delete the wrong sentences or clicked undo and then they can still keep all their products of writing clean.

in Blog....you can still keep your product clean. Because you only need to backspace or delete the wrong words for example and then you start with the new one, right? So, there's no what we call it um..there's no something that makes our product become dirty, something like that (S1-Interview).

.... if we want to replace certain sentence or words we can just undo it. We don't need too much eng like on a paper. Just undo and we can create a new sentence and publish it. That's the editing process I think (S3-Interview).

if we write on a paper, if we make a mistake we should erase it with correction pen and if we use Blog so we can just undo or delete it (S4-Interview).

In addition, another student revealed that writing in a blog was different with a paper because blog was a tool that makes her eager to write because she can revise her writing in the next if she found the mistakes in her previous writing. Moreover, the last student said blog has grammar correction program that makes her comfortable and eager to write on the blog.

....on a paper we have to make it in formal letter such as the words choices, the grammar, and when you start writing on blog you just type it and then everything that you want to write, it can be updated. So, if I have a mistake for the previous posting then I just read it again and wow it looks like bad writing and then I just edit it again (S2-Interview).

...blog can help us to correct our grammar when we write and we actually I little bit struggling in grammar. So, when I write in Blog there's like a red line and this is wrong I make mistake in grammar, so it can help me I can revise it and it's be better writing. when we write in a paper and it's not easily to us to correct the grammar. But when its come into the Blog and we can then the Blog can help us to correct the grammar. So, it is really really important. Because the grammar is the main point in writing, right? So, it's really important I think. (S5-Interview).

**b. Providing Opportunity to Practice Writing Skill**

The participant described the function of the blog that was a tool for them to keep their product of writings. Student 4 revealed that blog also provided the opportunity to them to write anything on their blogs included personal content. By keeping blog they became more creative because the facilities provided by the blog itself.

..... I don't need to keep a lot of paper in my bag only to keep the products of my writing. Because sometimes we never know we forgot to put the paper on the book but in Blog of course not. We only, we just need to remember our username and password and then we can keep our writing products until the end of the day (S1-Interview).

I think with blog we can more creative with the things on it. We can free to write our experiences, our imagination. .... blog is more interesting because blog provide many opportunities to us. With Blog, we can make anything we want (S4-Interview).

In addition, it was also a tool that let them to practice their writing skill. They were free to choose the topic and the design of the blog itself. Besides that, they were also free to decide the time and the place. Student 2 stated that she had created another blog besides the blog that she created for the assignment. She just liked to write on a blog and write everything that she saw in her daily life. Writing in blog such kind of practice that leaded her to build her confident in writing. No one cares about her if she wrote on her blog so that it was good for her psychology. The key point is she affirmed that the lecturer clarified her improvement in writing. That was encouraged her to practice her writing skill on her personal blog. Moreover four participants clarified that they always wrote on their blog twice a week. It meant that they were diligent in practicing their writing skill.

..... I didn't have any activity besides going out with my friends and then I start to write everything that I see in my daily life. I just write and the ideas just flowed.

..... I made my own Blog (my private Blog) and then I start to write and you know, day by day my ideas just come on. And my lecturer just said that “Oh, for previous semester until this semester you’re have a good improvement (S2-Interview).

I write on my Blog twice a week, at least (S2-Interview). At least twice a week, I think twice or three times (S3-Interview). I think twice or three times (S4-Interview). This is I think about twice a week (S5-Interview).

### **c. Improving Students’ Writing Skill**

All participants affirmed that writing in blog improved their writing skill. Students 2 believed that by practicing her writing skill on her blog, she got improvement. She also described that blog improved her writing skill in term of the process of writing itself. First, she just collected the ideas from any sources to get the information. Second, she made the draft of the writing before it was posted on her blog. Third, posted it on her blogs, and revised it if there were mistakes. Therefore, the ease of revising the writing product on the blog, it allowed her to learn more from the process of writing itself. To strengthen her opinion, the lecturer directly clarified her improvement. In addition, her writing on her blog showed that the highest number and length of postings. She had 30 postings with the length around 34-654 words in the every posting.

.... besides it’s the requirement of ICT class, I made my own Blog (my private Blog) and then I start to write and you know, day by day my ideas just come on. And my lecturer just said that “Oh, for previous semester until this semester you’re have a good improvement Laely.

It such kind of the process of writing itself. In the first time, I just collect the ideas and then I start to write with my friend but sometimes if my friend writes on a Blog, I looked at him. I said “wow your writing is good.” In what ways it’s good? “I mean that the word choices, it is such high level,” But your structure is better than me”. I just share the ideas. Yeah, I like writing in Blog. No one cares about me when I write on a Blog. May be, just flow over (S2-Interview).

I think I write Blog and I got improvement. .... from the planning. I think the ideas just come on. I usually got reading first and I took a reference about basic grammar and develop it by using my own words (S4-Interview).

Then, the other students clarified that blog improve their writing skill in term of vocabulary regarding on the spelling of the vocabulary itself. Furthermore, they also got the improvement in grammar. Moreover, students 3 stated that she got improvement in term of the ideas that she shared on her writing products by accessing new information from the other blogs or websites.

I think that it's more, it's easier for me to write especially by remembering the spelling something like that. .... Um..may be the vocabulary (S1-Interview).

.....because when we do writing we also do reading. By reading we got new vocabulary. You know, probably my English is not really rich. Even though I just feel that my English today is advanced, in the level of English students. But I think through my writing I got improvement, at least I have (S3-Interview).

Yeah, basically it's on the grammar. It's basically improved during my writing in Blog. .... yeah, it's little bit well organize than before, the previous writing when I write on a paper (S5-Interview).

#### **d. Creating Cooperative Learning**

Requiring the students to create and maintain a blog with their peers, it leaded the students to work in team. Here, the students reviewed and evaluated their friends' work. They also commented their friends' blogs. In the box comment they may write anything related to their friends' postings. Besides that, they also kept learning and gave feedback each other.

I think through my blog, there are many fresh ideas that me and my partner put on that blog. So, everything is updated and also we created by our own words also. ....because that was an assignment we also have a team work. That's why our team work on writing, we can give feedback each other (S3-Interview).

I think writing in blog, as I said before we share but in the same way we get information, we get feedback from the others. So, and I do comfort to use blog because you know sometimes when I write in paper and I need someone to correct my writing. And it's not really comfortable for me to ask directly to the person. So, if in blog they have a box comment and they give the comment and I learn from that. So, we can learn from each other in a blog (S5-Interview).

The participants stated that they like the process of learning during keeping blog. The assignment let them to the cooperative learning. Here, they wrote on their blogs with their friends. They discussed about the topic and collected the ideas before they posted it on their blogs. Their peers can correct their mistakes if they did it.

..... In the first time, I just collect the ideas and then I start to write with my friend but sometimes if my friend writes on a Blog, I looked at him. I said "wow your writing is good." In what ways it's good? "I mean that the word choices, it is such high level," But your structure is better than me". I just share the ideas. Yeah, I like writing in Blog (S2-Interview).

..... So, me and my partner just said "you should write like this, like this" and then "you should not write like this, like this". Because we are in pairs on that



assignment so each of our ability in writing is more equal at least there's no space with so high (S3-Interview).

**e. Providing Opportunity to Build Communication**

In the last session of the interview, student 2 concluded that blog was important as learning tool for writing because using blog as learning tool was like open the window. It means that it is unfair if the undergraduate students just stuck by writing on a paper, because they need to communicate and socialize with people around the world and get more information and develop their knowledge. It can be inferred from her response which affirmed that all her blogs' postings had commented by foreigners.

First it was that a good experience you know, foreigner have commented all of my postings. They just said that "wow, you're like a great Blogger" and then I just said "It is the first time I start to write on Blog". And then they said "Really? Then why was your Blog is on yahoo?" I just told that "my lecturer linked my Blog into yahoo, so I don't know" (S2-Interview).

Students posted the regular entries on their blogs by providing several websites that related to their blogs' topic. This kind of activity led the students to provide explanation and opinion about the websites that they found and they also persuaded the readers to visit the websites by providing the link on their blogs. They affirmed that it was not only for the readers in Indonesia but also people around the world can see and access their blogs.

.....Blog is easier to be accessed by everybody and our ideas are simply to be seen by the other people even foreigner from America/Canada, or from Europe (S3-Interview).

.....the first, with Blog we can write anything. The second, we can write the personal content, and many people can see it (S4-Interview).

I think that Blog is carry many beneficial for learning tool. Because when we write in Blog, we can share about our knowledge and in the same time we get information from the outside, from the what is that like we doing Ontell for, we write a Blog and we share with our friends in the class and they write I mean they read our article and after that we have little bit discussion out the class about our writing. And I think this is really I mean this is really interesting. This is the main point of Blog that we can share anything and we get information as a feedback from the friends (S5-Interview).

Therefore, the students agreed that writing in blog was not only about completing the assignment in order to pass the examination but also building communication

with people around the world. Besides that, they also shared their knowledge and ideas to someone who never they known so that they can make a friend with them.

**f. Being Easy to be Accessed**

For the student 3, she thought that blog was more modern and it was easy to be accessed by the students. As the twenty century students, they are closer with the internet connection, computer and other technology tools that can support their learning especially in writing.

..... Blog is more modern for this twenty first century and then it's easier for us to be accessed you know, today is internet connection era so that once again it's more modern and more easy for me to be accessed.

According to her, blog was easier to be created as learning tool, that is why she chose a blog rather than other tools for writing. In addition, more information related to students' blogs' topic were still accessible when they were writing on their blogs.

..... We are the twenty first century students and we are really close with the internet connection and modern era. I think it's easier to be accessed to write our ideas on blog so people can see it without we have to waste many paper. And blog is easier to be created, to be um..I forgot that word but in *Bahasa* we call it "*mengolah*" (processed) so I don't know sorry. Um..I think that the easier is one point that we can get from Blog than the other tool to be used in writing (S3-Interview).

And then through that Blog at least because it's online so we used internet connection, we can open another tab to get information that related to our Blog. We can see the example of the theme also. We can read through yahoo while we are writing on our Blog. That action emphasized our eagerness to know more about something. We got new information while we are doing our writing (S3-Interview).

**Discussion**

Requiring the students to create and maintain a blog demonstrated that blog allows the students to share their knowledge and write whatever they wanted in term of the topic that interested them. The results indicated that the students kept the interactive blogs that allowed the readers or other bloggers to give comment or feedback on the author's blog. The finding was strengthened by the view of Amir et al (2011) on blog in language learning that provides the opportunity for the students to cooperate with their peers so that they had a little bit discussion that allowed them to learn from each other. As students wrote and expressed their views on the specified topics, they also learned from their peers and themselves.

From the result of the observation, it can be revealed that most students tended to only post the entries on their blogs to fulfill the class' requirement. We can see that from 62 students, there was only 1 student who had 50 postings with

around 68-384 words and 7 students who had 30 postings with the length around 34-654 words. Furthermore, there were 5 students who had 26 postings with 35-358 words and 3 students who had 20 postings with the length around 25-455 words. It can be concluded that those students realized that writing in blog was important for their writing skill not just to fulfill the class' requirement and to pass the subject.

This result consistent with the theory of Warschauer (2010) which stated that the ease of writing and publishing on blogs makes them an appealing medium to students and thus has been found to help increase the quantity of student writing as well as its lexical sophistication. In addition, the study of Noytim (2010) which indicated that the sense of ownership in blogging processes encouraged the students to write more freely. It meant that they were engaged in fluency work so that they had more practice in writing. The results indicated that every student affirmed that blog was very important as learning tool for writing. This finding was strengthened by the view of Warschauer (2010) which claimed that the diffusion of new technologies have contributed to the teaching and learning of writing more important than ever before, for example by using blog.

In addition, the students thought that writing in blog was important because it had a lot of advantages for them. First, blog helped them to correct their mistakes in term of spelling and grammar errors. Second, keeping blog let them to practice their writing skill whenever and wherever they wanted. Writing in blog was good for students' psychology because no one cares about them when they were writing on their blogs. The result was they feel comfortable and confident to practice their writing skill. Third, blog improved students' writing skill in term of vocabulary, grammar, the ideas, and the process of writing itself. Fourth, by keeping interactive blog, they can get more information and feedback from their peers so that they can revise their mistakes in order to get a good writing especially in English. It meant by maintaining blog cooperative learning was created. Five, they can share their knowledge to the other people even foreigners. It meant that they can build communication with people around the world. Sixth, it was easy to be accessed by other people where the internet connection was available. Those arguments were strengthened by the view of Noytim (2010) that analyzed about students' perceptions of and attitudes towards using blog and Sidek&Yunus (2012) which indicated that blog provided a practice environment where students can think, reflect, and create language slowly so that they learn from practice.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

### **Conclusion**

The examination of the results of the study revealed that students thought that blog was important as learning tool for writing. Three students said that it was important and two students said that it is really important as learning tool for writing. They thought that blog carries several benefits in supporting their learning especially in writing because of blog has a program that can correct their mistakes automatically in writing, for example spelling and grammar errors.

In addition, by keeping blog, students can practice their writing skill whenever and wherever they wanted. As the result, blog improved students' writing skill in term of vocabulary, grammar, the ideas, and the process of writing itself.

Besides that, through writing in blog students can learn to be more cooperative because they worked in team and gave feedback each other, and they can build communication with people around the world. Moreover, knowledge and ideas that students shared on their blogs were also easy to be accessed by other people where the internet connection was available.

### **Suggestion**

For the pedagogical implications, lecturer needs to be aware of the negative side of blog where students may visit or share the inappropriate picture and link on their blogs. Lecturer needs to make certain criteria for students posting whether in form of sentence or picture including the page and link posted on students' blogs to minimize the negative side of blog. There should be a clear criteria which one that students can post on the blog such as: using only formal English and post only link and picture which related to education. Lecturer also needs to set the time of posting because there were several students did not post the websites that was required by the lecturer. Lecturer should be more active to visit students' blog to encourage students to write actively on their blogs and give students feedback in order to help them in finding their mistakes and revising their writing.

In addition, the results of this research can be deliberately applied to support the use of blog in English language learning, especially for university students. However, this research only focused on students' experiences during keeping blog. Thus, further research exploring more aspects on the use of blog for writing like the problem faced by the students and the solutions, especially in the context of university students. In addition, further research also can pay attention more to another activity on the blog, for instance the direct comment on the students' blogs' posting. Therefore, this research can be used as a reference for those who want to explore writing in online context.

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